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Combative General Is A Political Godfather Of 'Star Wars' Plan

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Retired Army Man Persuades
Conservative Contributors
And Confronts 'Naysayers'

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WASHINGTON—Daniel O. Graham is the man who produced the television commercial showing President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative as a child's drawing of a gigantic "peace shield" protecting a friendly community from menacing enemy nuclear warheads. At first, he says, he had doubts about the idea.

"I said, oh man, this is too—well, it isn't high enough on the intellectual plane," the retired Army lieutenant general recalls. Then, Gen. Graham says, he began thinking what impact the commercial would have on the "naysayers." A mischievous grin creeps over his cherub-like face: "It will have them literally crawling the walls."

The naysayers, the general contends, are those who want President Reagan to compromise his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) by trading it away for an arms-control agreement when he meets in Geneva with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev later this month.

Voluntary Adviser

Gen. Graham, a voluntary military adviser to President Reagan, is a political godfather of the change in U.S. strategic policy often referred to as Star Wars. Now he is determined to forge a political consensus so that SDI cannot "be traded off in any way, shape or form at the summit."

He likes to warn his supporters of the obstacles he faces. "I want you to know firsthand," he writes in one of his many fund-raising letters, aimed almost exclusively at conservatives, "about the unprecedented and powerful coalition that is lining up against me and the President—the Soviets, the Soviet backed 'Peace' movement, Liberal Congressmen and the Media."

A former West Pointer who retired from the government as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 1976, Danny Graham is a man most often described as "feisty," by friends and enemies who have followed his post-retirement career.

His "peace shield" TV ad infuriates his opponents. "This is the lowest form of ad-

vertising," asserts Gene LaRocque, a retired Navy rear admiral who often lobbies against Gen. Graham. "This ad is for simple folks. It's childlike, it's deceptive, it's false, it is in itself telling a great big lie. There is no way you can build a defense system like a shield over the U.S."

Howard Ris, the executive director of the Union of Concerned Scientists, says: "The commercial is very simplistic and misleading. It presents a kind of Astrodome bubble defense over the United States."

The SDI isn't a shield; it is a family of proposed—and mostly unproven—rocket, beam- and gun-type antimissile devices. But Gen. Graham's way of simplifying it is catching. Mr. Reagan, for example, talked about "scientists working to shield their cities and their citizens" in his recent speech before the United Nations.

Gen. Graham reportedly has had little recent access to the president, but he has a 1983 letter from Mr. Reagan framed on his wall. It says: "I value greatly your continuing efforts to help us build a national consensus and to find the difficult answers for the profound strategic problems that face all of us in this nuclear age."

The general was an adviser in Mr. Reagan's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns. He remembers being troubled by a persistent question that Mr. Reagan would ask all his military advisers: How could the U.S. change the policy of mutually assured destruction, the threat of reciprocal annihilation that has driven the U.S.-Soviet nuclear-arms rivalry since the 1950s?

"I figured there had to be some technological end run of the problem, not just more missiles, more tanks or ships," recalls Gen. Graham, who had become familiar with U.S. space-satellite technology during a career as a military-intelligence officer and deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

He recalled a Pentagon research project that had been shelved in the early 1960s. Called Bambi (an acronym for Ballistic Missile Boost Intercept), it envisioned a large number of orbiting satellites capable of shooting down enemy nuclear warheads with computer-aimed missiles.

Bambi was the inspiration for Project High Frontier, a proposal drawn up by a team of scientists and military experts assembled by Gen. Graham in 1982. He raised the money for the group, which worked under the auspices of the Heritage



Daniel O. Graham

Foundation, a conservative think tank. He also presented the proposal for a network of antimissile systems to the White House. High Frontier, after some reworking, became SDI.

Gen. Graham, who was championing a relatively low-technology system like Bambi, had frequent battles with one member of his panel, Edward Teller, a physicist and one of the designers of the hydrogen bomb. Mr. Teller, he says, pushed the panel toward the use of beam weapons, particularly an X-ray laser that is activated by a thermonuclear explosion.

Lobby Formed

The general lost that battle but won a later one, against a majority on the panel who wanted High Frontier to be delivered to the president as a secret option. "They thought this was a thing that, somehow, could be done if the president wanted to do it without any public pressures one way or another. I didn't believe that," he explains. "I thought the question was a political one."

So Gen. Graham says he "went full bore into political education," forming a tax-free Washington lobbying organization called High Frontier. His initial problem was swaying officials in the Departments of State and Defense, many of whom remained opposed to the idea until President Reagan launched the SDI program in a speech on March 23, 1983.

Gen. Graham took on the defense bureaucracy with a three-man office and a small fund-raising operation that ran in fits and starts. "He was pushing this stuff when nobody else would touch it. He made it politically respectable," recalls John Bosma, who worked with Gen. Graham at High Frontier. "I don't think anybody else would take the risks he did" to his reputation.

Mr. Bosma later parted with Gen. Graham over the nature of his political appeals to right-wing organizations and contributors. "I became quite concerned about his orientation with the crazy right," says Mr. Bosma. He asserts that Gen. Graham received early support from the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, an allegation the general denies.

Other former aides to Gen. Graham complain that High Frontier has had chronic money problems because he has a penchant for hiring expensive fund-raising and political consultants. The group's most recent tax return shows that it raised \$2 million in 1984 and that 60% of that went for consultants or fund-raising.

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The Alternative

Federal Election Commission records show that Gen. Graham's political action committee—American Space Frontier Committee—raised \$180,000 this year and ate up more than 90% of that in operating expenses, leaving \$15,882 for donations to congressmen. Of that, all but \$250 went to conservative Republicans.

"Conservative money started this thing and kept it going," explains Gen. Graham. "While I can find liberals who will agree with me, they're not going to give \$50,000. This organization needs money."

Meanwhile, he continues to wear down the opposition. Adm. LaRocque, whose Center for Defense Information generally takes a liberal stance on defense issues, says he is tired of fencing with Gen. Graham on TV talk shows. "We, in a sense, help him sell his Star Wars. Stations that put him on have to get one of us. I detest going on the air with him because the discussion immediately sinks to a very low level. He's not interested in the issue; he's just interested in winning the argument."

Another frequent debater with Gen. Graham, former CIA director William S. Colby, says that he disagrees with Star Wars but that he likes Gen. Graham's style. "He won the mind of the president," Mr. Colby says. "He had a vision and took the high ground. The man's a real fighter. We need guys like that."